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ABSTRACT

A number of issues in classroom second language instruction, particularly as they relate to grammar instruction, are considered in the context of recent research and theory. Discussion begins with a review of the nature and role of second language grammar instruction. Following this, these issues are explored: whether the native or target language should be used in explaining or discussing grammar; whether the inductive or deductive approach should be adopted; whether students can read basic grammar rules on their own, or need teacher intervention; whether grammar should occupy a central or more subordinate role in the classroom; how error correction should be used; whether students enjoy grammar and consider it necessary; and what constitutes grammar. The paper concludes that grammar is a necessary component of second language instruction, not to be either the primary focus of instruction or relegated to a status of unimportance, but viewed as a tool for development of communicative competence. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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ISSUES IN THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Much of the history of teaching foreign languages has been practically synonymous with the teaching of grammar,¹ with the content of the typical foreign language course consisting of little besides grammatical structures and the words to be learned.² But this began to change when the audiolinguistic approach, championed by the structural linguists, gained widespread acceptance in the United States and largely displaced the old grammar-translation method. Audiolingualism dominated foreign language teaching in the US for some two decades beginning in the 1940s. Adherents claimed that language learning was primarily the result of habit formation and over-learning, so they stressed mimicry of forms and memorization of sentence patterns to learn grammatical features. Even though teachers were not supposed to spend a great deal of time talking about the grammar rules of the target language, grammar was considered to be very important. They carefully sequenced grammatical structures from basic to more complex and also severely limited the range of vocabulary in the early stages of learning. Since audiolinguists regarded learners' errors as bad habits, teachers were supposed to strive diligently to prevent them; errors which they could not prevent they were to immediately correct before they became entrenched as "bad habits."

This view of language learning was soon overturned by the cognitive approach, which was formulated by linguists like Chomsky, who objected to many of the behaviorist views of the audiolinguists. Language was seen by the cognitive school as hypothesis formation and rule acquisition rather than as habit formation. Whoever has learned a language does not just have a list of words and sentences stored up—he/she can also create and understand new sentences never heard before. Grammar was also viewed by this school as important. Errors, which were

seen as both transfer from the first language and as a natural by-product of language learning, were analyzed and corrected in the classroom. Materials for language learning during this period were often based on Chomsky's early generative grammar.

In the 1970s and 1980s the comprehension approach, which competed with the cognitive schools of foreign language teaching, came to the forefront in the United States. This approach, which represented attempts by language teachers to utilize first-language learning methods to master a second language, stresses that comprehension is primary and that it should precede any attempts at production, much as a small child learns his/her first language. In the beginning, the learner is to use nonverbal responses to indicate comprehension (Asher--TPR). After language production has begun, some adherents of this method present the grammar inductively through carefully sequenced grammatical structures and lexical items.

Some linguists/methodologists then began to seriously question the need for grammar instruction because they felt that it does not greatly facilitate language learning -- it primarily helps learners to monitor or become aware of forms. "The preoccupation with grammatical correctness," wrote Terrell, "is essentially a felt need of language teachers and is not an expectation of either language learners or native speakers of L2 who with a few notable exceptions are usually quite happy to deal with foreigners making any sort of effort to speak their language" (326). He stated with regard to the beginning language student: "Most probably the first governing principle is to string the known and appropriate lexical items together in more or less the same order as L1 or in the order in which the words are thought of." Later, "once the student is communicating, however imperfectly, the teacher can then direct the materials and experiences toward the development of the student grammar ('interlanguage') in the direction of the adult grammar" (327).

Krashen proposed the hypothesis that one should "acquire" a language naturally through an innate cognitive process whereby teachers need only supply comprehensible input without explicit grammar instruction; indeed, without even stating or focusing on it at all. In his view, even error correction is largely unnecessary because advanced students will gradually learn to self-correct themselves as they refine and fine-tune their language skills. He seems to view grammar as more or less synonymous with "conscious learning," the opposite of "acquiring" a language, which to him is "conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them" (Principles and Practices, 10).

In the 1970s the communicative approach became an important movement in the language-teaching profession. In this approach communication, which is considered to be the purpose of language, is viewed as the goal of second language instruction. A language course should not be built around grammar but around pragmatic communicative functions. Language instruction must be content-based, meaningful and always oriented toward communication. The teacher's role is seen more to facilitate communication and only secondarily to provide feedback and to correct learner errors.

The communicative approach has, of course, had a major impact on the foreign language classroom. Exactly how great this impact has been is difficult to assess. Terrell claimed several years ago, "The role of grammar instruction has changed drastically in the last 40 years . . . from grammar translation . . . to communicative approaches" (22). But others find Terrell's view to be too optimistic and incline toward the opinion that the teaching habits of many of us may not have changed greatly despite the influences of the communicative approach. For example, Lalande, in a survey of high school German teachers conducted in Illinois, found that ". . . grammar continues to occupy a position of central importance in the

FL instruction of teachers and students comprising this study. Whether or not this is true of FL instruction in general is beyond the scope of this study" (37).

There is considerable evidence that Lalande's statement probably could be applied over a broad spectrum of the FL teaching profession. At the same time, many language teachers have developed a sense of concern, anxiety and even a lack of confidence in what they are doing as they, according to Scott and Randall, "continue to wrestle secretly with the role of explicit grammar instruction in a proficiency-based classroom" (357). We ask ourselves how we should best teach grammar, or whether we should be teaching it at all, and we often have guilt feelings about how we treat grammar in our instruction. In fact, many of us are probably afflicted with what Scott and Randall call "'grammar anxiety,' a condition characterized by a fear that proficiency-oriented instruction essentially means 'no grammar,' and are essentially paralyzed by worry and guilt about how much grammar we are teaching or at least are in a state of constant uncertainty as to how we should teach grammar" (362).

Nevertheless, there has been, as Mitchell and Redmond state, "... a decline in the focus on teaching explicit grammar, especially among those who wish to promote communicative skills. The emphasis on acquiring rather than learning a language has even often pitted grammar against communication as if the two were somehow mutually exclusive" (14-15).

Is it wrong to teach grammar in the classroom? In general, proponents of proficiency-oriented instruction do not claim that grammar and grammar instruction are wrong or unnecessary, but rather that the focus on it, when it occurs, should be on grammar as a means to an end and not as a means in itself. Grammar should not be the centerpiece of the classroom. As Galloway states, "... [we] want teachers to understand that a vital aspect of a successful proficiency-

oriented foreign language program lies in how grammar rules are presented rather than in the elimination of explicit discussion of grammar rules" (4).

Even Krashen, as well as his sometime collaborator Terrell and also VanPatten, another advocate of the "acquisition" of languages, do not propose the total abandonment of grammatical instruction in the early stages of language learning. They recognize that some knowledge of grammar rules is necessary, even for beginning learners. Terrell has recently gone so far as to find a place for explicit grammar instruction in the acquisition process, although he eschews returning to a grammar-based syllabus or a grammar-dominated classroom. He wrote, "... some informal evidence exists that adults do not automatically use input to develop competence in the way Krashen has suggested. ... If some adults do not process input as Krashen suggests then it may also be the case that a conscious knowledge of grammar may play a greater ... role in language acquisition and processing than Krashen posits" (53).

So what is the place of grammar in the foreign language classroom today? Several writers have discussed the complex and unsettled issue of teaching grammar. For example, Kalivoda wrote, "The nature of grammar learning is complex and under considerable debate" (267). Similarly, Mitchell and Redmond explained: "The role of grammar in the second language classroom is still unsettled" (19), and, says Koshi, the issue of whether "to teach or not to teach grammar is a dilemma that has faced second language teachers for about two decades (403).

This paper will not attempt to provide definitive answers to all the questions about the teaching of grammar. Such answers are difficult to obtain, partly for the reasons indicated above by

Kalivoda. But it will attempt to look closely at some of the questions and provide some proposed solutions.

The first question to consider is the following: Should the native or the target language be used in explaining/discussing the grammar? One aspect of Krashen's theories of language learning which seems to have been universally accepted (and which has had an enormous, positive impact on the teaching of foreign languages) is the concept that language learners need massive amounts of "comprehensible input." For example, Kalivoda writes, "Common sense dictates that the listening comprehension skill cannot be developed in the classroom which fails to provide massive amounts of meaningful listening practice. Neither can the students' speaking skill become a reality if students' classroom communication is not done in the foreign language" (954). Furthermore, he stresses that teachers need to work at conducting their classes in the target language without breaking down into the native language "for all or at least most of the class hour to provide massive doses of practice with the oral language" (956).

But we can all agree that students need "massive amounts of oral practice" and "massive amounts of comprehensible input" and still be unsure about how to handle teaching the grammar. Can grammar teaching provide some of the needed comprehensible input? Kalivoda states that the directive about speaking in the target language "does not preclude grammar" (956). In fact, grammar can indeed be used to reinforce communication. However, he hurries on with the following caveat (956):

A 10-minute safety valve activity in the native language at the end of the hour might be inserted to answer students' questions about language form. The latter is suggested

because, although students grasp a great deal of grammar during foreign language listening, they may require clarification of certain points from time to time. White, in her discussion on limitations of comprehensible input, points out the difficulty for learners to sort out all language forms solely through FL listening activities.

Most researchers would agree that even the teaching of grammar can provide appropriate and valuable "comprehensible input" for the learner. Interestingly, Lalande also found that "students overwhelmingly supported the use of the target language in teaching grammar. While most preferred that some English be used, many students . . . preferred that the TL constitute the primary language of instruction. The clear implication here is that students want to hear more TL used in their instruction" (38).

Anyone who is uncomfortable with only explaining the grammar in the native language can follow Kalivoda's advice and provide a native language break to discuss and clarify any grammar problems which arise. Four warnings must be issued, however: a) if you break away into English the risk is always run that you can't get back to the target language; b) if you constantly do important things in English it can damage the students' confidence that the target language can really be used to communicate; c) switching to the native language can inhibit the students' ability to think in the target language. This is one of the hardest tasks of the language learner and the mastery of thinking in the target language must not be endangered. d) Switching back and forth can encourage students not to give themselves up wholly to the target language.

2). Should we use the inductive or the deductive approach in teaching grammar? Here we need a clarifying note: Some of the literature equates inductive with implicit and deductive with explicit, whereas other material makes a distinction between them. In the interest of

simplicity, I will not make any distinction. In addition, we need to note that there is considerable disagreement as to exactly what the inductive and the deductive approaches are. Although there are more complex definitions, let us go with this simple one. In the deductive approach the rules are first presented and then examples are given, whereas in the inductive approach the rules are presented through examples in such a way that the student can discover the rules

The debate about whether to use the inductive or the deductive approach is an old one. As Fischer stated, "Foreign language methodologists and teachers have long debated the value of a deductive or inductive approach . . ." (98). Is it better, more logical and easier for students when the teacher gives an explanation of a grammatical principle preceding its application, or does the inductive approach in which the student discovers the grammatical principles for himself have a greater impact and lead to longer retention? This debate is even at the center of what one author (Diller) has called "the language teaching controversy."

Cognitive teaching materials tend to favor the deductive approach, with devices like "advance organizers" (even Terrell wrote in favor of advance organizers [58]), which give a preview of the rules to be learned, and a general deductive format. But some methodologists, like Shaffer, view the deductive approach as one which "tends to emphasize grammar at the expense of meaning and to promote passive rather than active participation of the students" (395).

The inductive approach is often associated with the audiolingual method, which presented carefully sequenced structures, followed by brief explanations, in an effort to enable the students to learn the language in a "natural" way without resorting to explicitly stated rules. Because of the perceived failure of the audiolingual method, many methodologists saw the inductive approach as likewise a failure. However, current practitioners no longer rely merely

on the rote learning of numerous examples of a structure until its use becomes a habit, as it was practiced by the audiolinguists. Today one can view the inductive approach more in terms of focusing student attention on "grammatical structure used in context so that they can consciously perceive the underlying patterns involved" (Shaffer, 395). Proponents claim that students, especially adult learners, retain the system better when they have participated in the self-discovery of the rules" (Koshi, 405). Others see it as "an alternative to traditional approaches that neglect conversation and to natural ones that avoid conscious study of grammar. Student attention is focused on grammatical structure used in context so that students can consciously perceive the underlying patterns involved" (Shaffer, 395).

Some preliminary studies seemed to demonstrate the superiority of the deductive method. Researchers like Carroll had also asserted that weaker students would not be as capable of generating ideas on their own through the inductive method and, as indicated above, others praised the alleged greater logic of the deductive method. But as early as 1973 McNamara cast doubt on relying totally on a deductive approach: The student, he wrote, "must learn to get on as soon as possible without explicit rules" (62). Gradually others departed at least somewhat from an insistence on a strictly deductive approach. And recent research shows numerous areas in which an inductive approach is highly effective. One such area seems to be with structures which are similar to the native language or dissimilar but easier than the native language. Research by Fischer has demonstrated that there seems to be less likelihood of negative transfer from the native language when the deductive method is used in such cases. By the same token, he recommends that a teacher might well use a deductive approach with structures that are more complex than those in the native language, but without reference to the native language to avoid negative transference (101). Another factor in the controversy

between the inductive and the deductive approaches is the fact that younger learners (especially children) apparently tend to be more holistic in their learning style, which argues in favor of using more of the inductive approach for children.

So what is the solution to this ongoing controversy? Research has not proven definitively which approach is better. Interestingly, however, Lalande found that 82% of the teachers in his survey preferred a deductive approach (38). Mitchell and Redmond also discovered that "few adult learners seem willing or able to 'pick up' or acquire a second language grammar implicitly as they did the grammar of their native tongue, nor do they have the time" (16). Shaffer recently concluded that there was "no significant difference . . . between the results using the two presentations [inductive and deductive]" (399). Some teachers are, no doubt, better at one method than the other. At the same time, students also vary in their ability to perform under one approach or the other. Mitchell states, "Currently both approaches are considered viable, but some learners (the left-hemisphere dominant who are more analytical) prefer deductive learning while others (the right hemispheric, who are more holistic learners) favor an inductive approach" (16). The holistic learner seems to learn better from an approach that goes from examples that allow him/her to discover and generalize the rules him/herself. The more analytical learner, on the other hand, seems to learn better from a presentation and discussion of the rules before moving on to practice their implementation. This appears to be borne out by Lalande, who found that ". . . different groups . . . preferred different learning strategies when encountering difficulty with grammar" (38). Thus, it would seem that a combined approach might be in order, as suggested by Corder: "What little we know about the psychological processes of language learning . . . suggests that a combination of induction and deduction produces the best results" (133).

There is definitely a place in the language classroom for both approaches, even when one considers different learning styles of students. Actually, every student can benefit from both approaches, since no one is strictly an inductive or a deductive learner. Fischer, for example (17), finds that the most effective way of learning grammar is through the use of both methods. He would advocate the use of the inductive method when the grammar rule being taught is similar to the one in the native language, in which case it is easier to visualize the rule because of his/her familiarity with it in the native language. On the other hand, the deductive method can be easier when the rule is different and the learner's native language could be a hindrance to grasping the rule if it were taught inductively. Stauffer agrees that various approaches are needed for different purposes and different learners but he stresses the importance of "learning grammar in the context of communicative situations" (400).

3) Can students read and learn grammar rules on their own? This is a question which was addressed by Scott and Randall. At the beginning of their study they asserted (358): "Clearly a teacher is essential in the design and supervision of interactive activities in the classroom." But then they ask "... do learners require a teacher to a similar degree when they are learning the rules for basic grammatical structures? More specifically, can foreign language learners read, understand and apply the grammar explanations ... without direct teacher intervention" (358)? They answered this question at first as follows: "Based on our findings, the answer ... is both 'yes' and 'no.'" Later this equivocal response was delineated a bit. "Ultimately, the results of this research experiment suggest that students can read and learn some, but not all, linguistic structures" (361).

Some of the conclusions which these authors reached were a) that creative explicit grammar instruction is still essential in foreign language teaching in the classroom, even though not all

structures will require explicit teaching; b) those structures which are more content-based are more easily learned without classroom instruction than are those which are more function-based. So teachers, in planning their lessons, need to identify structures in terms of their content or function. By analyzing grammar in this way teachers can give students some degree of autonomy in learning grammar, and thus be able to devote more class time to meaningful and communicative activities (361). More thought and research still needs to be done on this subject to better determine what elements in each foreign language are function elements and which are more in the content category. The final word of these authors on their research is the following : "... while creative grammar instruction is essential in the classroom, students can be given a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility in the process of reading and learning linguistic structures outside of class" (362).

4) Should grammar occupy a central or a more subordinate role in the classroom? In contrast to the other questions which have been posed, this is one which is rather easily answered. In fact much of what we have been discussing up to this point points firmly to the answer to this question. Higgs wrote that teachers "should do in the classroom only what cannot be done profitably anywhere else or in any other way" (292). Furthermore, he asserts that "if, as foreign language instructors, our classroom activities consist largely of going over the exercises and content already found in the textbook, then we stand fairly accused of not doing our job" (293). We have already ascertained that there is still ample room in the proficiency-oriented classroom for grammar, but there is no longer a place for the grammar-dominated classroom where students do little more than practice grammar exercises, with grammar as the centerpiece of instruction. Our goal must be to make the classroom a place

where learners receive "massive amounts of input" in a program built around teaching and practicing communication.

5) What about error correction? What do students as well as teachers think? The attitude of teachers toward error correction has changed greatly in the past hundred years. Near the turn of the century Jagemann stated: "No faulty answer [should] ever [be] allowed to pass" (220). This idea was an accepted tenet of the language teaching profession at that time and for many years thereafter. This was an especially strong principle of the audiolinguists, who demanded immediate correction of all errors. Beginning in the 1970s, however, methodologists, researchers and teachers alike began to shed many of the behaviorist ideas of the audiolinguists and turn to other approaches, as noted above. Over the next decade or so the concept of error correction swung from one extreme to the other--from an almost religious need to correct all errors immediately to the feeling, expressed by researchers like Krashen, Terrell and Hammond, that error correction is not good, or, as Hammond put it, of "no value" in speeding up second language acquisition" (414). Some linguists even claimed that error correction can be harmful to the learner because it can activate the "affective filter," thus raising the student's anxiety level and hindering language acquisition. Those who oppose error correction often claim that the acquisition of a second language, just as one learned one's first language, is governed by principles of universal grammar and that grammatical structures are acquired in a pre-determined order without regard to the sequence of instruction or error correction. Even though there are still many adherents of the communicative approach who discredit explicit error correction, more recently theorists and practitioners have moved away from this extreme view. For example, Allen *et al* posited that "... the lack of consistent and unambiguous feedback is likely to have a detrimental effect on learning" (67). Even Terrell, a

strong advocate of the natural approach, which tries to duplicate as much as possible the way one's first language was acquired, now acknowledges that incorrect input which students are exposed to in the classroom (even their own incorrect input) can result in faulty learning: "... [these] approaches ... will probably have to resort to strict error correction to avoid wholesale acquisition of incorrect forms and structures" (61). According to Schulz, "Increasing evidence indicates that grammatical awareness and corrective feedback can indeed promote second language acquisition, at least for specific structures and for certain types of learners. In fact, instruction and negative evidence might be essential for mastery of certain structures for adult and adolescent learners" (344).

Schulz' study uncovered some fascinating information concerning students' attitudes toward error correction in class. Only 4% of the students polled in her survey disliked it when teachers corrected them in class and a resounding 94% disagreed with the statement on this survey: "Teachers should not correct students when they make errors in class." Sixty-five percent of the students indicated that they "feel cheated if a teacher does not correct the written work they hand in." Furthermore, "ninety percent of the students would like to have their spoken errors corrected ... and 97 percent their written errors. ..." (346-347).

There was a great deal of discrepancy between the teachers' and the students' attitudes about both error correction and the explicit teaching of grammar. For example, whereas 90% of the students agreed with the statement: "Generally, when students make errors in speaking the TL, they should be corrected" only 34% of the teachers of commonly taught languages and 50% of teachers of less commonly taught languages agreed with it. While 86% of the students disagreed with the statement "I dislike it when I am corrected in class," only 33% of their teachers felt that the students were favorably disposed toward error correction.

6) Do Students enjoy grammar and consider it to be necessary? One of the major tenets of the communicative approach of language teaching has always been that what students really want to do is to talk. A corollary of this seems to be that they do not like to be burdened by dull, dry grammar instruction. Is this really the case? Lalande found the following: "An astonishingly high number of students tallied positive associations with the role of grammar in FL instruction--this despite the fact that they readily checked other responses which attested to the hard work associated with learning 'grammar'" (38). The research by Schulz on this topic, which was based on a 1994 survey of college students in several different languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish), also brought out some very interesting and, no doubt to many, surprising attitudes of not only students but also teachers about teaching and learning grammar. As Schulz indicates, "... students hold more favorable attitudes toward formal grammar study than do the teachers as a group. . . in the total sample 80% of the students vs. 64% of the teachers believe that the formal study of grammar is essential to eventual mastery of the language" (345). In addition, 48% of the students vs. only 38% of the responding teachers agree that students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of a language. Furthermore, even though the large majority of both teachers and students believe that the study of grammar helps in learning a FL, more of the students (85%) than of the teachers (74%) hold to this view. With regard to the enjoyment of grammar, 46% of the students indicated that they liked the study of grammar, whereas only 18% of their teachers felt that way and a surprising 26% of the students claimed to want more grammar instruction in the classroom. Another interesting aspect of this survey was the question as to whether it is important to practice the foreign

language in situations resembling real life. Eighty percent of the teachers felt this to be the case, compared to only 69% of the students.

7) I would like to pose one last question: What is grammar? The idea for this question was inspired by an article by Higgs entitled "Teaching Grammar for Proficiency" in which he discussed just this point (among others). He stated: "The first step in reaching a goal of instruction is to recognize that the notion of 'grammar' must be broadened, that grammar can no longer be understood as including just morphology and syntax" (291). The problem of a too-narrow definition of grammar, believes Higgs, is the cause of much of the disagreement about whether and how to teach grammar. "When we talk about 'teaching grammar for proficiency,'" he says, "we mean grammar in this extended sense." Any pedagogy which seeks as its goal communication cannot just content itself with one or a few aspects of the language. No, "such a pedagogy must recognize that there can be no significant successful communication without the 'grammar' *in toto* to hold it in place." Grammar, according to Higgs, is "a system for converting meaning into language. Under this definition, the term 'grammar' covers the entire linguistic system of expression. Hence messages are successfully transmitted and received in any communicative modality uniquely through the mediation of the grammar of the language." He defines grammar as "a system for converting meaning into language." That is indeed an interesting definition of grammar, and one, I think, which has a great deal of truth in it.

CONCLUSION. In the past three decades or so, as Celce-Murcia so cogently puts it, "we have seen grammar move from the position of central importance in language teaching, to pariah status and back to a position of renewed importance, but with some diminution when compared to the primacy it enjoyed . . . and had enjoyed for so long before then. Grammar is

now viewed as but one component in a model of communicative competence, . . ." (476). Without some knowledge of grammar, communication is limited. As VanPatten has said, "We need to provide our students with grammar instruction," but this instruction must be "consonant with our communication-based and input-rich classrooms" (449). Our fears that we should not be teaching grammar or feelings of guilt that we are teaching grammar can be laid to rest—provided we are not making grammar the primary focus of our courses. As Celce-Murcia wrote, "As a result of the communicative revolution in language teaching, it has become increasingly clear that grammar is a tool or resource to be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse rather than something to be learned as an end in itself" (466). But it is a tool, and a very necessary one, one with which we must provide our students. As Koshi says, "Formal instruction in grammar is as important as input, if not more so" (404). Furthermore, as Terrell wrote: ". . .the belief held by many instructors and by many students themselves is that grammatical instruction is indeed helpful in the acquisition process" (61-62). The last word shall be from Celce-Murcia, who so cogently argued, "In the case of adult learners, especially those interested in academic work, we cannot assume that grammar will simply emerge on its own, given sufficient input and practice" (477).

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¹ This introductory material draws heavily on Marianne Celce-Murcia's "Grammar Pedagogy in Second and Foreign Language Teaching." TESOL Quarterly 25 (1991), 459-462.

² There were exceptions, of course, like Berlitz and de Saurez, who championed vastly different methods of language instruction.